

THE BELLOWS BURNED

NO. 890

A SERMON
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*“The bellows are burned.”
Jeremiah 6:29.*

THE prophets frequently spoke in parables. They did this partly to excite the attention of their hearers. Those to whom they spoke might not have listened to morally instructive truths of God expressed in abstract terms, but when they heard mention of common things, such as bellows, and lead, and brass, they turned aside and asked, “What is this which this man has to say?” Moreover, metaphors often convey to the mind truth which otherwise would not have reached the understanding, for men frequently see under the guise and form of an illustration a doctrine which, if it had been nakedly stated, they could not have comprehended. Illustrations, like windows, let light into the chambers of the mind. There is also this use in a metaphor, that even if it is not understood at first, it excites thought, and men exercise their minds upon it as children upon a riddle, and so they learn perhaps more through a dark saying than through a sentence at first sight transparent. Yet further, metaphoric speech is apt to abide upon the memory; it retains its hold, even upon the unwilling mind, like a lion which has leaped upon a giraffe in the desert. Mere bald statements are soon forgotten, but illustrations stick in the soul like hooks in a fish’s mouth. Therefore I thought it right this morning, to take the simple and homely illustration of the text, which Jeremiah before had so well used, and see if we cannot impart thereby some awakening truths of God to your minds; perhaps you may with more pleasure attend to them, exercise more thought upon them, and embrace them more earnestly in your memory because they come in homely pictorial garb.

I. “The bellows are burned.” This short sentence, as Jeremiah used it, was intended to apply to THE PROPHET HIMSELF.

He likens the people of Israel to a mass of metal; this mass of metal claimed to be precious ore, such as gold or silver; it was put into the furnace, the objective being to fuse it, so that the pure metal should be extracted from the dross. Lead was put in with the ore to act as a flux (that being relied upon by the ancient smelters, as quicksilver now is in these more instructed days); a fire was kindled, and then the bellows were used to create an intense heat, the bellows being the prophet himself. He complains that he spoke with such pathos, such energy, such force of heart, that he exhausted himself without being able to melt the people’s hearts—so hard was the ore, that the *bellows were burned* before the metal was melted; the prophet was exhausted before the people were impressed! He had worn out his lungs, his powers of utterance; he had exhausted his mind, his powers of thought; he had broken his heart, his powers of emotion, but he could not divide the people from their sins, and separate the precious from the vile!

Now, alas, this is no solitary case, for throughout the whole history of the line of heaven-sent ambassadors, this has been the rule, and not the exception! The bellows have in almost every case been burnt, but the metal has not been melted. It was so with Noah; for 120 years that preacher of righteousness continued to warn the people of the coming deluge; he added to his words the more powerful eloquence of deeds, for moved with fear, he prepared an ark so that his preaching and his practice agreed. And yet by the space of 120 years he labored on, but not one single person was led to find a shelter in the ark which he prepared, and with the exception of himself and family, the whole of his hearers perished in the judgment against which he warned mankind! In later times God’s servants seldom fared better—the most of them were spitefully persecuted, and at best they were treated with neglect. Listen to the mournful question of Isaiah, “Who has believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” “All day long,” he says, “I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.”

As for Jeremiah, from whom we borrow our text today, he was indeed like the bellows, burned in the fire, for you hear him crying, “O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people.” And that famous lament of Jeremy, at the end of his prophecy, remains on record as one of the most amazing utterances of woe that could be poured out by a patriot and a prophet over a captive people. Need I add that even to the days of John the Baptist, the servants of God wearied themselves in vain with a graceless people? Say, it was not so with prophets only, for He, our Lord and King, the chief of all teachers, fared no less cruelly at the hands of men! Never man spoke like that Man; He was indeed a bellows that might well, with His vehement force, have created a heat that might melt an adamant stone, but yet, after one of His most mighty sermons, His hearers would have cast Him down headlong from the brow of the hill where their city was built! And at the end of His life’s sermon, you know how the Cross and the crown of thorns were the honors meted out to Him; sooner than the people would repent, and become as molten metal, the Messiah, Himself, was made like the bellows which are burnt by long use at the fire.

Nor has this ceased to be the fact. Since the days of Christ, civilization, with all its progress, has not softened the human heart. Men are no more amenable to the jurisdiction of God than they used to be; that heart which in prophetic times was like the nether millstone, is not today like wax; looking down the list of the apostles, and of the confessors who followed them, we perceive what were the rewards accorded to the messengers of the Lord—they were stoned, burned, cast to beasts or drowned in the sea; the faithful servants of God and truth were housed only in desert caves, or sepulchral catacombs, or loathsome dungeons; the comforts afforded them were the stocks, the fetter, and the rack. Their dying honors were the illuminations of the stake, or the glitter of the headsman’s axe, and as for burial, full often they found no sextons but the dogs. The world was not worthy of them, and yet it cast them out as too vile to live. Instead of the nations returning to their God, they took the messengers of the King, one by one, and treated them despitefully, and slew them, and cast them out of the vineyard. This iron-hearted world could not be melted—let the preachers of righteousness blow their vital breath upon the coals, the fire would burn the bellows, but not melt the ore!

Now, what does this say to us? Does it not tell the preacher and each one of us who are laboring for Christ, that we ought never to be discouraged when we meet with little rebuffs from those whom we seek to bless? You have not yet resisted unto blood striving against sin! What if you have been ridiculed? What if your best endeavors have been misrepresented? What is this compared with the sufferings of those who have gone before you? Do you run with the footmen, and do they weary you? What would you have done if you had been destined to contend with horses? If these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, make you cry, “I will speak no more in the name of the Lord,” of what coward blood are you? How little worthy are you to be written in the same muster-roll with those who counted not their lives dear unto them that they might be with Christ, and gather in His redeemed! If you try to be like the bellows to melt these hard hearts, and make them flow into the mold of Christ’s gospel, you must *expect* to be burned in the fire! And because you encounter a little persecution, or disrespect, or difficulty, do you flee to your chamber, and cry, “I will give it up”? Shame upon you! Rather, *redouble* your efforts, and pray God to give you a greater blessing by way of success, or if not, greater patience to bear His will, for mark you, brethren, though the bellows were burnt, and the metal was not molten, the work was only lost so far as the *metal* was concerned, the Great Founder was not confounded! Men shall glorify God one way or the other whenever the gospel is preached to them. If they reject that message of love, yet they have made manifest in them the long-suffering of God in having borne with their hard-heartedness; they show the mercy of God in having sent the gospel to such unworthy persons; they cast all slurs away from the severity of God, for clearly it cannot be too severe to visit with His vengeance those who have willfully rejected His mercy; those who weary the preacher, who brings them nothing but good news, deserve to be left in misery! It can by no means be complained of that, by-and-by, another preacher with heavier tidings is sent to summon them to judgment; many of the damned in hell heard the gospel—oh, say not that the minister’s toil was lost because they rejected his entreaties! May we labor not in vain, and spend not our strength for nothing, for God’s honor is vindicated, and His justice cleared from all manner of accusation, since the lost from among these, our cities, perished not

without the opportunities of His mercy; they went not down to the pit because relentless justice would not accept repentance; they had space for repentance; they had invitations to return, but they resolved on daring the wrath of God. The wooing of mercy was, used and the entreaties of love were spent upon them, but inasmuch as they would not come, their blood is upon their own heads, and even in the terrible wrath of God, His rejected mercy is honored! The preacher must not suppose that if men are not converted, he has lost his work. We are unto God a sweet savor as well in them who perish, as in them who are saved, though in them who perish we are unto the men themselves, a savor of death unto death—yet we are still a sweet savor unto God. If we do but proclaim the gospel, and are willing to wear ourselves out in so doing, if the bellows are burned, yet verily I say unto you, we shall not lack our reward! If we receive no recompense in the conversion of souls, we shall have it from the lips of Him who shall say, “Well done, good and faithful servant! If you have not been successful, yet you have been *faithful*—enter into the joy of your Lord!”

We must not pass from this first meaning of the text without noticing that while it is the preacher’s business to continue to labor till he is worn out like the bellows that are burnt, yet his so doing involves many solemn consequences upon those for whom he labors so unsuccessfully. O my hearers, this is the great test that discerns between the precious and the vile, between the Chosen and the reprobate! The gospel is the infallible test! If it comes to you being preached affectionately, and with the Holy Spirit, if it does not save you, it confirms you in your ruin; if it does not lift you up to heaven it will be like a millstone about your neck to sink you to the lowest hell! I know of none who are in a more hopeless case than those who have long listened to the gospel preached to them with all affection and earnestness, and yet have resolved to continue in the error of their ways. We cannot tell what the metal is till we get it in the fire, but the fire tries it, and if you have lain long in the white heat of an impressive gospel ministry—the love of Jesus being like coals of juniper, and yet you have never been melted, if you do not tremble for yourself, I take leave to tremble for you! If a mother has pleaded with you; if she has even gone to her grave with sorrow because of the hardness of your heart, oh surely this will testify against you in the day of reckoning! This marks you even today as hardened by the deceitfulness of sin; if you have worn out one after another of faithful friends who would gladly have conducted you to the cross; if you have made your God to be, as Amos says, like a cart that is loaded with sheaves, and pressed down, beware, O man, beware! You are filling up the measure of the Almighty’s wrath; it is almost full, and when it is filled, beware! Beware! Beware! God is long in being provoked, but when His anger is at last stirred within Him, woe unto those against whom He lifts up Himself! Oil is a smooth and gentle thing, but once set it on fire, and how it burns! And love, that tender thing, if once it turns to jealousy, how terrible its flame! Christ is the Lamb today, but tomorrow He may be a lion to you if you reject Him; that face which wept over Jerusalem, that dear face which is the very mirror of everything that is compassionate will, if you continue hardened in heart, become the image of everything that is terrible, so that you shall call to the rocks, “Hide us,” and to the mountains, “Cover us! Hide us from the face of Him that sits upon the throne.” I wish that I had power to plead with you with the pathetic earnestness of Jeremiah. I fall far short of that, but I can at least speak with all his sincerity. I pray you do not wear us out with entreaties; turn unto God while yet He gives you space. I pray you, if you have long rejected, harden no more your neck lest you suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. It may seem a slight thing to reject the preacher, but what if he is God’s ambassador! An insult to the Lord’s ambassador may be avenged by the Lord Himself! Since we come to you with nothing but terms of love, and invitations of mercy, and say to you, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved,” we pray you, in Christ’s place; put not away our invitations, lest while *we* are exhausted, *you* should be condemned! God bless this gentle word of admonition to many of you, and Christ shall have glory by it.

II. We turn now to a second interpretation of the text. This does not materially vary from the first. The bellows may be here meant, and according to many expositors it is so meant, THE AFFLICTIONS WHICH GOD SENDS UPON UNGODLY MEN.

These afflictions are sent with the design of seeing whether they will melt in the furnace or not. If words of admonition have not been successful with them, God often in His great mercy tries with the ungodly the judgments of providence, if perhaps by humbling them in their estate, or paining them in

their bodies, or bereaving them of their friends, they may be brought into a humbler and better mind, and may then seek the favor of God. Now where divine grace comes with these afflictions, it often happens that this good result is answered, and like Manasseh, the sinner being taken among thorns, seeks unto the Lord, and finds salvation. But without grace, without the Holy Spirit's softening power, all the afflictions in the world are but like bellows that blow the fire, but they are sooner burnt; I mean the afflictions themselves are sooner exhausted than the sinner's heart is made to melt under the heat caused.

It is clear enough in history that many men have been utterly insensible under divine Judgments; chief and foremost among these was Pharaoh. God sent upon him plague upon plague; the great bellows poured in a terrific blast upon the furnace into which the Egyptian was cast! Ten great and vehement tempests of God's wrath followed each other; the huge furnace might well have melted granite, but Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not let the people go. In the full blast of the bellows he did for a moment relent, and he said, "Entreat the Lord for me," but it was all false repentance, for no sooner were the frogs or flies taken away, than once more he said, "Who is Jehovah? I will not let the people go." He was raised up for this very purpose—to show forth the power of God to break those whom His mercy could not melt. There have been others like he; there are others like he, I fear, in this congregation this morning! Like Israel, given up to successive afflictions, they have for a while repented, but then have returned again to their idols as fast as the judgments have been removed. They are like Ahaz, afflicted again and again, of whom it is written, "When he was afflicted, he sinned yet more and more: this is that king Ahaz." Jerusalem was often chastened for her sins with siege and famine, plague and pestilence—but all this refining fire refined her not, and at last the incorrigible city was given over to her doom. Her streets became rivers of blood, her palaces became a heap of ashes, and her very site was sown with salt, and her doom a theme of horror, making both the ears of him that heard it to tingle. Metal that will not melt must be cast away. I say there have been, and there still are sinners upon whom the judgments of God seem to exert no melting power; they only grow harder the more severe the judgments of God become. Ah, my hearers, I fear there are some such among you! You have now suffered a long series of trials; one after another they have come upon you; your heavenly Father will not let you perish without at least, by His providence, giving you line upon line, warning upon warning! He has not left you like Moab to be settled on your lees, but He has emptied you from vessel to vessel. Now, if all this has not brought you to His feet, you may expect to endure still more trials. If slight strokes will not suffice, they shall grow thicker, and heavier, or mark, the Lord may say, "Let him alone, he is given unto idols." And then if He never strike you again, it shall be worse with you still, for whom God gives up, hell shall swallow up, and where God's providence and grace leave off, there God's justice, and His wrath begin, never to leave off, world without end! O you who have just escaped from a sick bed, saved as by the skin of your teeth from the jaws of death; O you who have lost your property, and have been brought down from opulence to poverty; O you who have suffered bereavements following each other, whose scars are fresh upon your soul, throw yourselves into the arms of Him who strikes you, and yield to Him at once! It is far too unequal a combat; let not the stubble contend with the fire! Let not the straw defy the flame! You shall be utterly consumed in the day of His terrors when He lays bare His arm to deal with you! If His rod makes you smart, what will His sword do? And if the hidings of His power have been so terrible, what will it be when He puts on His armor, and comes forth to fight against you? Let not God exhaust His afflictions on you; O let not the Lord be made to say, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you? O Judah, what shall I do unto you?" Behold, He has dug about you; He has done for His vineyard all that could be done, yet if there is no more to be done in *mercy*, there will be *much* more to be done in vengeance! If the bellows are burned, yet the fire is not quenched, and that fire shall burn even to the hottest hell! God save you from it for His mercy's sake.

III. A third application of the text may be allowed. "The bellows are burned." This may be an allusion to THE CHASTISEMENTS WHICH GOD SENDS UPON HIS OWN PEOPLE, which are not always as successful as they ought to be, by reason of the hardness of His *servants'* hearts; in such cases it seems as if affliction itself would be exhausted before they would be purified, the bellows would be burned before the metal would be melted.

My dear fellow Christians, you and I, if we are walking very near to God, ought to know and *do* know, that God gives us much instruction by little hints. When two persons perfectly understand each other, they can say almost as much with their *eyes* as others can with their tongues. Now, you who are the King's favorites will sometimes suffer a little twitch of bodily pain, or a little trial in business, or some slight relative affliction—that little trouble may be the Lord speaking to you with, as it were, a shake of the head, or a lifting of the finger. There is something in you which your loving Lord would have you purge out, something displeasing to Him or dangerous to you; now search and look for this upon the faintest hint. He has said, "I will guide you with My eyes," but He has added, "Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding"—for mark, dear brothers and sisters, if you do not observe those motions of God's eyes, He loves you too well to let you sin, and therefore the hints will become stronger, and they will be more painful. Notice how the psalmist proceeds—"Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto you." God does not wish to bit and bridle you! He would have you guided with the gentle warnings of His eyes, but if you will not accept the more tender guidance, why then, it must come to the bit and the whip; if you will not be melted at a common heat, you shall find the temperature rising higher and higher; and if one severe trial is not sanctified to you, you may expect another of a still hotter sort, for the Great Refiner will have His gold pure, and will utterly remove our tin.

I do *not* lay down the doctrine that all our afflictions are indications of indwelling sin! On the contrary, I believe that some afflictions may be sovereign, that other afflictions are sent for a trial of our graces that God may be glorified by our victories, and yet a third class are intended to promote our advance in grace. But yet I *am* persuaded that the rod in God's house is principally used because of the offenses of the children, and I am persuaded that if you would be spared that rod, so far as it is a *chastening* rod, you can only escape it by obedience, and by a very careful observance of the gentle motions of your Father's eyes. Why, a dear child, when he is living obediently and lovingly with his father, does not need in order to repentance, to have done so much amiss as to cause his father to speak—he is grieved if he has done enough to make his father shake his head! That shake of the head cuts him to the quick, and should he unhappily provoke a sharp word from his father, why then his tender heart communicates with his weeping eyes, and he cannot forgive himself. Yet there are unloving children who will even rebel until they draw down blows upon themselves, and even then hold out till the strokes are multiplied, and the father proceeds from chastening to repeated chastening. I am afraid the most of us are such children. We cause our Father to chasten us very frequently, and if we have to mourn amid many tribulations, we may well say, "Why does a living man complain; a man for the punishment of his sins?" Brothers and sisters, do not let it be said of us that the bellows are used till they are worn out before our afflictions melt us to repentance, and cause us to let go of our sins; but let us seek of the Lord a spirit that is amenable to His rod, a filial heart, a sensitive nature. O that the breath of His word may make fire enough to melt our hearts to Repentance, and that we may never provoke trials which shall even burn the bellows!

IV. Fourthly, I may, without violence to propriety, use the text as if it taught that the time is coming when THE EXCITEMENT OF UNGODLY MEN, which now keeps the fire of their activity vigorously burning, will be taken away from them, and then they will flag and die out in sorrow.

The fire in the smithy burns gaily and merrily, and sends forth troops of leaping sparks dancing into the air like stars; but no sooner do the bellows cease to blow than there remains only a little fire, and by-and-by only cold coals, and dead ashes, for everything depends on the bellows. Perhaps, my hearer, this morning you are like a furnace excited by the bellows, and your excitement is the pursuit of wealth. You can rise early, you can sit up late, you can work, you can bear a deal of exertion and mental strain because you are bent on accumulating a fortune. Yes, but what would you do, what have some done when sudden reverses have swept away the accumulations of a life, or when a panic has blown down their speculations like card houses? Oh, what tears have strong men shed in this city, tears which fell not outside the cheek, those had been harmless; but they dropped within the soul to scald and sear it with ever-abiding melancholy! That which cheered and comforted them, the gain of wealth, has gone, and the busy merchants have been ready for the lunatic asylum or for suicide. How these golden bellows will cease to blow when men come to die! Ah, how little will wealth stimulate the joys of the last moment! Fool, you

have only bought yourself a marble tomb, and what is that to your poor dust-red ashes? You are now to leave all you have; you are as the partridge that sits on the eggs, but hatches them not; your joys are all for another, and not for you. Oh how often do men who have been happy enough in the accumulation of riches, die in utter misery with all their gold and silver about them, because their bellows of avaricious acquisition have been burned by their very success, and the flame of hope and ambition has hopelessly died out!

Many activities are kept up by the love of fame. Men have climbed step by step the ladder of public esteem, and loved the dizzy height. How men will flame and blaze while fame blows the bellows! How content men are to burn away their lives for the approbation of their fellow creatures, yet many of them have lost all joy in honor long before they have departed this life! And certainly those who have nothing else to inspire the flame of hope in the last article of death but the approbation of men, will find their fires dwindling sadly low and dark; dark, dark must be their departure! How sad for a soul to know that the clangor of fame's trumpet is dying away from its ears to be superseded by the blast of that awful trumpet ordained to wake the dead, and call them to their last account! Dear hearers live not with such aims as these, or your bellows will be burned.

Often, alas, conspicuously often, men live for pleasure, and for pleasure they destroy body and soul, but after a while fullness follows lust, enjoyment palls, and the man's vigor decays, and his mirth is gone; the last days of the votary of fleshly pleasure are like that dwindling fire which despite its temporary blaze, is a poor dying thing when the bellows foster it no longer. Alas for the wretch who is dead while he lives, standing amid his fellows like a blasted tree amid the forest that has been split by lightning; a little lingering verdure proves that life is yet there, but the decaying trunk, and sapless branches show how near it is to death. Make not pleasure the bellows of your life, lest these bellows be burned in the fire, and the flame of your joy go out.

Others have made the great bellows of their life hypocrisy. They have been religious that they might be esteemed; they have frequented God's house that they might be thought respectable; but at last they have been unmasked, or if not, in the last hour death has knocked off their mask, and let the man see in the mirror of truth what he really is; the silver veil has been taken from the pretender's leprous brow, and he has seen himself to be accursed, and then, poor wretch, how the bellows have been burned in the fire; no longer could he keep up his feigned zeal, and pretended joy; his hopes turn to ashes, and his consolations die out in despair!

My dear hearers, have nothing for your stimulus but that which will last as long as *you* last; have nothing for your master motive but than which you can take with you *beyond* the grave; seek nothing as the grand objective of your existence but that which may be suitable for an immortal's pursuit. Remember, this life is not all, and the grave is not the goal of being; you are not dumb driven cattle, going to the shambles of death, there to be slaughtered and forgotten; you are about to enter through the porch of this life into the palace of eternity, or, if you will dare to make it so, the *dungeon* of eternity. Your future shall be as this life foretells it. O that you may be helped by divine grace to spend this life in a way that from it you may pass into the better, and not to waste the present that from it you may descend into that worst of ills which has no end.

V. The last use we shall make of the text is this, "The bellows are burned." This may be applied to **THOSE EXCITEMENTS WHICH KEEP ALIVE THE CHRISTIAN'S ZEAL**. The mercy is that I can only apply this negatively; for I trust we are well assured that the bellows which maintain our spirit's ardor are not burned.

My dear friends, we have, in our time, seen in certain churches great blazes of enthusiasm, as if Vesuvius and Etna had both taken to work. These outbursts of flame have been misnamed *revivals*, but might just as well have been called agitations. I have known, in my short time, certain churches in the spasms of delirium, meeting houses crowded, aisles filled, preachers stamping and thundering, hearers intoxicated with excitement, and persons converted wholesale—even children converted by hundreds—they said *thousands*. Well, and a month or two after, where were the congregations? Where were the converts? Echo has answered, "Where, where?" Why, the converts were worse sinners than they were before! Or they were mere professors, puffed up into a superficial religion from which they soon fell in-

to a hopeless coldness which has rendered it difficult to ever stir them again. I love all *genuine* revivals—with all my heart I would aid and support them—but I now speak of certain spurious things which I have seen, and which are not uncommon, even now, where there has not been God's Holy Spirit, but mere excitement, loudness of talk, big words, fanaticism, and rant, and nothing more. Now, in such cases, why was it the fire went out? Why, the man who blew the bellows went away to use his lungs elsewhere, and as soon as ever the good man, who by his remarkable manner, and telling style, had created this stir was gone, the fire went out! I have known quiet churches in which the same thing has happened in a manner equally grievous. The people have been very earnest, and much good work has been done, but the departure to heaven of their excellent minister has been to this people what the death of a judge was to the children of Israel. O may God spare those valued lives which in our churches promote the earnestness of God's people, and may it be long before the bellows are burned! But still, mark you, our zeal ought not to be so sustained. The fervor of the church ought never to be dependent upon the eloquence of any *man*. Our reason for earnestness should not depend on the ministrations of any particular individual. Principle ought to sway us, and not passion—real fervor, and not the excitement which may be gathered from vehement speech and crowded assemblies.

Brothers and sisters, I shall not enlarge upon this except to come home to you. There may be those here who in years now past were very earnest, and the fire in their soul was burning very vehemently. To you I speak. You were generous in your gifts; you were constant in your attendance upon the means of divine grace; you were always at the prayer meeting you were diligent in pious labors, you were happy and useful, but now you have subsided into a state of lethargy. You give but little, you pray but little, you work less, and feel scarcely anything. You have grown colder and colder, and colder by degrees, till you are now as cold as the North Pole itself! Now, brother, how is it that your bellows are burned? How is it that the excitements which kept you alive are gone? Ought they to have departed? Am I not right in saying that your obligations remain the same as ever they did? Ten years ago you owed your salvation to the precious blood of Jesus Christ—to what do you owe it now? Ten years ago you were nothing but a sinner looking up to the crucified Savior—what are you now? How much of your debt to Christ Jesus have you paid? Can you boast of not being as much in debt as then? I frankly confess that if I owed my Lord much 20 years ago, I owe Him far more today! Instead of rising out of His debt, I sink the deeper and the deeper in it, for I am all over in debt to Him! Your obligations, my brother, my sister, remain; if they made you zealous 10 years ago, why not now? If it was but right and just that you should live for Christ, who bought you then, in the name of right and justice, what shall excuse you now? As your obligations remain the same, so your Master abides the same. If you loved Jesus then, and for the glory of His name you sprang into the forefront of the battle, is He less worthy now? Is Christ less lovely? Does He love you less? Has He been less faithful? Is He today less kind? Is His intercession failing? Is His precious blood losing its cleansing power? Can you afford, therefore, to treat Him worse when He is still the same yesterday, today, and forever? Why, if it really was obligation to Christ, and attachment to His person that acted as the bellows to keep your zeal blazing, there are the same bellows today! So why not be just as earnest, or even more so? My dear friend, surely at this moment the strength that keeps your soul alive is the same as it used to be. You were sustained in the past by the Holy Spirit; if the Holy Spirit has grown old, and His power is palsied, I can understand your zeal becoming feeble, and your being excused for it, but since the Holy Spirit is always the same, ought not the fruits to be the same? If you only had your native strength, I can understand your decaying, as we all must, by the lapse of years, but the immortal life within you is not affected by the decay of the body—it ought to bring forth fruit in old age to show that the Lord is upright. Since your strength is still the same, the bellows are not burned—so let the fire flame up afresh today.

Moreover, you who served God in your youth should remember that the objectives for which you served God remain the same. Souls are as precious today as they were when you, as a lad, gave your heart to Christ. Ah, you thought then, you could do anything to win a soul! But men are damned today as they were then; hell is as hot now as it was then; death is as terrible a thing today as it was 20 years ago, and therefore let not the bellows be burned, but return to the fullness of your zeal, and serve your Master as you did in the days of your espousals!

My dear friend, for you to decline as you grow older will be to make the world say, “That man gets wiser, and the wiser he gets, the less he loves God. Therefore,” say they, “it is foolish to love God at all.” Will you put such pleas into the mouths of blasphemers? Will you be an advocate for the devil? Will you thus practically help the ungodly to sleep on in their careless disregard of God? I pray you not to do so! As you grow in divine grace, and I trust you do so if you are indeed a Christian, is it consistent that the stronger the tree grows, the less it should bear? Is it consistent that if the child worked, the man should sleep? If the boy carried his burden, is the full grown man to carry none? Are you, because you progress in the divine life, to be gradually excused of all Christian service? Shall only the recruits march to battle, and the veterans never bear the banner nor wave the sword? Oh, it must not be! Besides, you are drawing nearer heaven, and are you to be less heavenly as you get nearer to the New Jerusalem? Are you to serve God less as you approach nearer to the place where you are to serve Him day and night without weariness? Are you to be *less* like Christ as you approach nearer to the place where you are to be altogether as He is? No! Scorn such insinuations—

*“Let every flying hour confess
We bring Your gospel fresh renown!
And when our lives and labors cease
May we possess the promised crown.”*

Suspect, dear brothers and sisters, that if your zeal is flagging, there must have been some other motive than a heavenly one that made it so lively at first, for heavenly motives never cease, and neither do they lose their reasonableness, or their efficacy. Ask yourselves if you were genuinely converted; examine yourselves whether you are really in the faith, for if you are not, it is no wonder that your piety declines; but if you are true converts, your faith must be as the shining light that shines more and more unto the perfect day. Instead of bellows burned in the fire, brothers and sisters, may it be yours and mine to go to our grave in a hale old age with more earnestness within than our bodies can execute. May we serve our Master till the last minute; if the scabbard is worn out, let the sword be sharp. God grant us every day we live to serve Him better; every hour that He gives us here be getting more and more spiritually-minded, and more and more anxious to tell abroad the glories of His name. God bless you for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JEREMIAH 6.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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